June 1990

Library-Vendor Relations

Corrie Marsh

George Washington University

Barry Fast

Scholarly Book Center

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Recommended Citation

Marsh, Corrie and Fast, Barry (1990) "Library-Vendor Relations," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 2: Iss. 3, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2273>

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ISSUES IN LIBRARY-VENDOR RELATIONS

by *Corrie Marsh* (George Washington University) and *Barry Fast* (Scholarly Book Center)

ISSUE: *Should vendors supply publishers with the names of libraries who purchase their publications?*

As many publishers are moving toward expanded marketing programs, they are asking wholesale jobbers to provide customer sales lists for their products. What do libraries want the vendors to do?

There are plenty of reasons for booksellers to supply the names of ordering libraries to publishers and for libraries to agree, in principle. This would help the publishers to refine their marketing and promotion, thus, in theory, lowering their marketing costs. It would help publishers define what type of books sell better in different types of libraries, enabling the publishers to publish more carefully and perhaps less wastefully. Over time, this would lead to an enhanced relationship between booksellers and publishers. The publisher and library relationship would provide closer contact through better marketing and advance consultation about future publications.

However, booksellers are reluctant to cooperate with publishers in this way. In the past few years, more and more publishers have either been requiring direct purchase or offering competing discounts for direct purchase. There is a climate of mistrust, largely as a result of lower discounts from publishers to

wholesalers (a surreptitious way of raising prices to libraries). The Bowker decision to sell only direct, followed by Gale's elimination of discounts to booksellers has added to this atmosphere of wariness.

We assume the publishers want to target direct mail to their library customers (heaven help them if they try to increase telemarketing...). Librarians and booksellers would like to know how this information is to be used. It may conceivably be used to develop more efficient and cost effective marketing; it might also be used to reduce the role of the book vendors (with what economic impact on libraries?)

The present condition of mild antagonism serves no one's interest. Libraries suffer from price increases through lower discounts. Booksellers suffer through lower profit margins and their own suppliers trying to sell around them. Publishers garner ill will from their customers, the booksellers and libraries, while missing the opportunity that cooperation with the bookseller would engender.

We'd like to hear your thoughts on the subject for the next *Against the Grain*. Write to: Corrie Marsh, Head of Acquisitions, Gelman Library - The George Washington University, 2130 H. St., NW, Washington, DC 20052. ✉

"Good news...we're computerizing our ordering system."